Illinois Elections: Policy and its Impact

CAIR-Chicago has outlined some policies, specifically in the realm of human and civil rights, that can affect us as Muslims, or that impact many people in general. Most of these have gained traction or gone into effect in the past year, and acknowledging these can help further show us how impactful politics are in our daily lives. This is in no way a comprehensive list of every policy that has gone into effect, but rather a few handpicked policies that help show the breadth of politics and how the impacts it can have on us.

Policies at the federal level affect us all, even though it is harder to impact federal policies especially when there is a divided government. Because federal policies are aimed at a very large population of people, they tend to be less personalized and can be harder to pass. Some notable policies at the federal level include the following:

- **White House Executive Actions, Memoranda, & Proclamations**
  - **Proclamation on Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to The United States**
    - January 20, 2021
    - This proclamation revokes Executive Order 13780, Proclamation 9645 (Muslim Travel Ban), Proclamation 9723 (Removing Chad from Muslim Travel Ban), and the most recent ban on African-majority countries, Proclamation 9983 (African Travel Ban).
    - The Muslim Travel ban was a direct representation of the blatant Islamophobia in the United States, and it served as a means of suppressing Muslim communities. Many Muslims living in America were either directly affected by this or had family members who were. The fact that it ever happened is disheartening, but it is relieving to see the efforts that were taken to combat and address it.
  - **Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States**
    - January 26, 2021
This proclamation condemns and combats Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders given the stigma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic initially breaking out in Wuhan, China.

This comes at a time where anti-Asian hate crimes were at a high, and it is important that all marginalized groups feel safe. Many Muslims also identify as Asian, and it is important to stand in solidarity with them.

- **Notice on the Continuation of The National Emergency with Respect to the Actions of the Government of Syria**
  - May 9, 2022
  - The United States calls on the Assad regime, and its backers, to stop its violent war against its own people, enact a nationwide ceasefire, facilitate the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in need, and negotiate a political settlement in Syria in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.
  - This proclamation is notable because the Syrian refugee crisis is one that we are all familiar with, especially Muslims, as it affects many of our families and communities. This step in foreign diplomatic affairs is one that is headed in the right direction.

- **A Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day, 2022**
  - January 14, 2022
  - This statement proclaims January 16, 2022, as Religious Freedom Day.
  - This is especially important to note as Muslims because we would not be able to practice our faith freely in this country had it not been for the first amendment. Statements like these commemorating such days help emphasize the foundational principles that this country was formed on, and remind us of our right to practice our religion freely.

- **U.S. Supreme Court**
  - **United States v. Texas**
    - Argued November 1, 2021
    - Can the United States sue the State of Texas in federal court to prohibit enforcement of an unconstitutional abortion law?
The court ended up dismissing the case. This sets the scene for where we are today with Roe v Wade about to be overturned—a move that will affect many people across the country, especially marginalized groups.

- **U.S. Senate, 117th Congress.** Things in the Senate are slow due to the filibuster, which is where members of a legislative body prolong debate on proposed legislation so as to delay or prevent a decision from being made, which makes it difficult to get much passed. However, there have been notable efforts and below are a few of those:
  - **Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (SB 65)**
    - This bill passed in the Senate on July 14, 2021.
    - It imposes importation limits on goods produced using forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China and imposes sanctions related to such forced labor.
    - Because the Uyghurs are a group that is discriminated against and being put in concentration camps because they are Muslim, this is something that deeply affects all Muslims. The actions taken to stand in solidarity with the Uyghurs was a necessary action.
  - **SR 226**
    - This bill was introduced on May 19, 2021.
    - This is a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the United States supports Israel, our greatest ally in the region, and its right to defend itself against terrorist attacks.
    - The United States has been known to back the Israeli apartheid state, and there continue to be efforts such as this one to legitimate the oppressive state of Israel. It was introduced to the Senate but was not agreed to. It is still important to keep up with different efforts that have been introduced even if they do not ultimately affect policy because it helps shed light on many problems.
  - **Improving Mental Health Access for Students Act (SB 1585)**
    - This bill requires institutions of higher education that participate in federal student-aid programs to share contact information for suicide prevention resources with students. It passed the Senate on May 12, 2021.
As students, even though this is not a Muslim-specific policy, it still goes to show just how much politics affects our daily lives even at universities.

- **COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act (SB 937)**
  - This bill became public law on May 20, 2021.
  - This bill requires a designated officer or employee of the Department of Justice (DOJ) to facilitate the review of hate crimes and reports of hate crimes. The DOJ must issue guidance for law enforcement agencies on establishing online hate crime reporting processes, collecting data specific to factors such as race or national origin, and expanding education campaigns. Additionally, DOJ and the Department of Health and Human Services must issue guidance aimed at raising awareness of hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - During the pandemic, many marginalized groups were further affected, and it is important that there were efforts to address the effects of the pandemic in terms of hate crimes. As an organization fighting for civil rights, this is especially notable for CAIR-Chicago because it embodies the work that we are fighting for, whether it be hate crimes against Muslims or other vulnerable populations

- **U.S. House of Representatives, 117th Congress.** The bulk of the policies that are passed are through the House,
  - **HB 256**
    - This bill passed the House on June 17, 2021.
    - This resolution seeks to repeal the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002
    - The ongoing use of military force in Iraq portrays the Islamophobic nature of the “war on terror” and indirectly and directly affects all of us. This resolution seeks to urge congressmen and congresswomen to reconsider the use of military force in Iraq and contemplate why it has been permitted for so long.

- **Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (HR 6256)**
  - This bill became public law on December 23, 2021.
  - Imposes importation limits on goods produced using forced labor in China, especially the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous
Region, and imposes sanctions related to such forced labor. This is to ensure that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China do not enter the United States market.

- This is especially important as the Uyghur genocide is an ongoing problem, and we cannot be complacent and consume products directly coming from the forced labor of others. It is reassuring to see that actions are being taken to address this issue and it is not just being swept under the rug.

○ **Combating International Islamophobia Act (HR 5665)**
  - This bill passed the House on December 14, 2021.
  - This bill establishes within the Department of State the Office to Monitor and Combat Islamophobia and addresses related issues. With Islamophobia and other hate crimes on the rise, this is definitely a step in the right direction to promote the safety and comfort of Muslims around the country. While it has not passed in the Senate, it has still covered significant ground and made an impact.

○ **Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act (HR 5746)**
  - This bill passed both houses on December 14, 2021.
  - This bill addresses voter registration and voting access, election integrity and security, redistricting, campaign finance, and voting rights. It also expands voter registration (e.g., automatic and same-day registration) and voting access (e.g., vote-by-mail and early voting) and limits removing voters from voter rolls. It also establishes Election Day as a federal holiday.
  - This is especially important, as voting rights are up in the air once again, and it is essential to protect those very rights that keep our democracy alive.

○ **Translate Act (HR 5574)**
  - This bill passed the House on November 18, 2021.
  - This bill directs the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to develop a plan to ensure that TSA material disseminated in major airports is better understood by people accessing such airports, including by foreign language speakers and people with vision or hearing impairments.
This emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and ensuring that our airports are a place where everyone feels welcome and can understand what is being asked of them, in order to remove some of the intimidation that happens at airports, especially for people who may not speak English as fluently or are hard of hearing.

- **Iron Dome Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022 (HR 5323)**
  - This bill passed the House on September 23, 2021.
  - This bill provides $1 billion in supplemental appropriations for the Department of Defense to provide to the government of Israel for the procurement of the Iron Dome defense system to counter short-range rocket threats.
  - It is important to note where the government is sending their money, especially when it is going to finance the oppressive state of Israel.

Policies at the state level hit closer to home, and can be even more impactful on our lives than those at the federal level, especially because it pertains more specifically to our lived experiences. Here are some notable state policies that have gained traction or gone into effect:

- **IL Senate, 102nd Illinois General Assembly**
  - **MUHAMMAD ALI DAY (SR 0092)**
    - This resolution was adopted on May 31, 2021.
    - Declares January 17, 2022 as Muhammad Ali Day in the State of Illinois.
    - 2022 was the first time that Muhammad Ali Day was being celebrated in Illinois. The celebration of Muhammad Ali’s contributions, especially as a role model to many Muslims, is very significant.
  - **SCHOOL CODE-HOLIDAY-MUHAMMAD ALI (SB 0564)**
    - This bill became a public act on August 19, 2021.
    - Declares January 17, 2022 as Muhammad Ali Day in the State of Illinois.
    - In the provisions relating to holidays, adds January 17 (the birthday of Muhammad Ali) to the list of commemorative
holidays. In the provisions relating to courses of study, provides that the teaching of history of the United States shall include the study of the contributions made by Muslims and Muslim Americans to society.

- **SCHOOL CODE-NONCITIZEN-BOARD ELECTION (SB 1565)**
  - This bill was introduced to the Senate on June 15, 2021.
  - This proposed bill requires the State Board of Education to create a voter registration affidavit that shall be the exclusive means by which a noncitizen of the United States may register to vote in school board elections.
  - While it has not gained too much traction, this is still an important effort to consider because many non-citizens are still very affected by the school systems in their districts, and should have some say in who their representatives are, especially if it impacts the education of their children.

- **CRIMINAL CODE-HATE CRIME-IMMIGRATION (SB 1596)**
  - This became a public act on August 2, 2021.
  - It amends the Criminal Code of 2012 to include, as a hate crime, the commission of the specified criminal acts against a person because of the actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status of the person.
  - As a civil rights organization, this development is especially notable because it affects the types of cases that come through. Many people are still discriminated against due to their immigration status, and it is necessary to take that into account.

- **EDUCATION-MODEST SPORT UNIFORM (SB 1784)**
  - This bill became public law on December 17, 2021.
  - Provides that the governing board must also allow a modification for the purpose of modesty in clothing or attire that is in accordance with his or her cultural values or modesty preferences.
  - This specifically affects many female Muslim athletes who ran into problems with uniforms for sports. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to practice the sport that they are passionate about, and people's personal or religious values should not have to be compromised in the process.

- **SCHOOL CODE-RELIGIOUS FASTING-P.E. (SB 2484)**
This bill was introduced in the Senate on April 16, 2021.
This bill provides that a pupil shall be excused from engaging in a physical education course during a period of religious fasting if the pupil's parent or guardian notifies the school principal in writing that the pupil is participating in religious fasting.
Even though this bill has not passed, the efforts made are a step in the right direction. Fasting during the school year is difficult, and it is made even more difficult with classes like physical education. It is important to provide the necessary and accommodating environment for Muslim students and others who may be fasting. This is a direct example of how politics can affect our daily lives, especially as Muslims.

- **IL House of Representatives, 102nd Illinois General Assembly**
  - **Immigration-Right to Counsel (HB 0025)**
    - This bill passed the House on May 30, 2021.
    - It creates the right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Act, which creates a task force that will investigate the implementation of universal representation for covered individuals in immigration removal proceedings.
    - This ensures that everyone has equal access to representation, especially as they are undergoing removal proceedings. This can affect anyone, Muslims included, and it is important that these measures are in place.
  - **COLLEGE FORMS/NONBINARY OPTION (HB 4265)**
    - This bill passed the House on March 2, 2022.
    - It requires that, beginning with the 2022-2023 academic year, all documents and forms, including applications for admission, issued by a public institution of higher education offer a student the option to select "non-binary" if the document or form asks the student to identify the student's gender or biological sex.
    - This is especially notable because it shows that there have been efforts made for identification purposes, which is a measure that also affects Arabs, many of whom are Muslim. Because there is a lack of identification options for them, this measure provides a hopeful outlook that in the future, things will change in that regard as well.
○ SCH CD-ABSENCE FOR CIVIC EVENT (HB 5488)
  - This bill passed both houses on April 8, 2022.
  - Provides that any child from a public school, subject to guidelines established by the State Board of Education, shall be permitted by a school board at least one school day-long excused absence per school year for any middle school or high school student for a child that is absent from school to engage in a civic event.
  - This is an important development because it outlines the importance of civil service for students who probably can not vote yet and encourages them to get involved politically at a young age.

○ PRISONER RELIGIOUS RIGHTS (HB 5455)
  - This bill was introduced on January 31, 2022.
  - This creates the Faith Behind Bars Act. It provides that a person committed to a correctional institution or facility has a constitutional right to practice his or her faith in the correctional institution or facility absent harm and without undue burden to the State's correctional system.
  - The importance of being able to practice your faith while in prison is something that should not be overlooked. Issues arise with prayers such as Friday prayers, finding halal food, and fasting during Ramadan. Many people find faith while in prison, and it is important to accommodate everyone.

○ SCH CD-DRESS CODE POLICY (HB 4222)
  - This bill was introduced to the House on January 5, 2022.
  - Provides that a school uniform or dress code policy adopted by a school board or local school council shall not prohibit the right of a student to wear or accessorize graduation attire with items associated with the student's cultural or ethnic identity or any protected characteristic or category identified in the Illinois Human Rights Act.
  - This is especially important for individuals who want to accessorize their graduation attire but have not been able to do so completely freely due to restrictions. While this has not gained too much traction, it is still a notable effort that will affect students across the state if implemented. One prominent
example is the allowance for religious head coverings, like the hijab, which can now be worn with the cap and gown.